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THE JEWISH PRESENCE IN CYPRUS BEFORE AD 70

In the time of Sergius Paulus (Acts 13, 7), Cyprus was inhabited by indigenous Cypriots, Greeks (from Greece and Egypt), Phoenicians, some Romans (few in comparison with other groups), and a large community of Jews. What is surprising is the almost total absence of Greek (or Aramaic) synagogue inscriptions, especially since we know from the Acts of the Apostles and other sources that a substantial group of people of Jewish origin was living on the island.¹

G. Hill² and T. B. Mitford³ suggested some decades ago that the first Jews settled in Cyprus in the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus. According to the Talmudic sources, they were very probably obliged to supply wine annually for the services in the Jerusalem Temple.⁴ However, today we are able to date the first Jewish settlers as early as the fourth century BC. Found in ancient Kition were three Phoenician inscriptions with evidently Jewish names: Haggai, son of Azariah, and Asaphyahu.⁵ Commercial contacts are later confirmed by finds of Hasmonaean coins in Nea Paphos.⁶ The first epigraphical proof is provided by a Greek inscription from Kourion of a late Hellenistic date, where a Jew named Onias is mentioned.⁷ The next attestation of Jews, also of the late Hellenistic or early Roman period, comes from a text dealing with permanent habitation of Jews in Amathus. According to Mitford the text seems to concern “the construction in cedar wood of the doorway of a synagogue” in that city.⁸ If the Jews built a synagogue, they had a community there. Herodian coins appear in the early Roman stratum in Nea Paphos.

Literary sources also confirm the habitation of Jews in the second century BC. This is indirectly confirmed by a letter from the Roman consul Lucius Calpurnius Piso (in office in 138 BC) to the king of Egypt, Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (Physkon) (146–116 BC). A copy was also sent to Cyprus. The text, as reported in the 1st Book of Maccabees (15, 15), stated Roman protection over the Jewish settlers in numerous

¹ The relatively high number of Jews on Cyprus is supported indirectly but seriously by descriptions of their rebellion in 115/116 AD (Dio Cassius, LXVIII, 32, 2–3). Cf. also Reifenberg 1932, 209–211 and, van der Horst 2006, 28–32.

² Hill 1949, 241 note 4.

³ Mitford 1990, 2204.

⁴ Jerusalem Talmud, *Yoma* IV.5. Cf. Neubauer 1868, 369; Oberhummer 1903, 23–24. About the Jewish population in Cyprus, cf. also Roth 1972, 1181.

⁵ Hadjisavvas, Dupont-Sommer, Lozachmeur 1984, 101–116; Noy, Bloedhorn 2004, 223–226. P.W. van der Horst (2006, 78) appears not to be definitely convinced about the fourth century BC presence of Jews on the island but agrees that the names in question “seem to contain Yahwistic names.”

⁶ Cox 1959, 25–26, no. 191–200.

⁷ Mitford 1971, 133, no. 70.

⁸ Mitford 1990, 2204 and note 146 (quoting RDAC 1968, 77, no. 8).

kingdoms, provinces and free cities. What is more, the receivers from the Eastern Mediterranean were instructed not to fight with Jews and to send back Jewish criminals who escaped from Judaea to their king, Simon the Maccabee, a friend of Rome, for punishment.⁹ The Jewish settlers in Cyprus were under the protection of Rome despite the direct subjugation of the island to the Ptolemies.

Much information about the Jews in Cyprus comes from the works of Josephus. Writing about the times of the rule of Ptolemy IX Soter (142–180 BC), he states emphatically that the Jewish community in Cyprus was in “a flourishing condition,” like the Jews in Jerusalem, the Judean countryside and Alexandria.¹⁰ In Egypt the Jewish community had been supplying mercenaries; for example, Josephus describes their cooperation with Ptolemy’s mother, Cleopatra III, who, fighting with her son in 106/105 BC,¹¹ organized a military expedition of Jewish troops headed by her trusted generals Chelkias and Ananias.¹²

The generals mentioned, Chelkias and Ananias, were the leaders of Jewish troops from the Heliopolis district in Egypt, where Onias IV built a temple similar to the Jerusalem temple around 160 BC, on the ruins of an old Egyptian sanctuary in Leontopolis.¹³ The Jews were very loyal mercenaries, and Cleopatra fully trusted both generals. But the fact that a Jewish expedition to Cyprus took place means even more for P.W. van der Horst. In his opinion, this fact “confirm[s] the impression that the island had a large Jewish presence in the last decades of the second century BCE.”¹⁴ However, from the quoted report of Strabo it is not even clear if the expedition was successful. Most probably it was not. Ptolemy Lathyros evacuated from Cyprus and part of the army followed him, taking up the cause of Cleopatra’s son. From Josephus’ transmission it is only evident that some of the queen’s troops, the Jewish ones, remained faithful to Cleopatra, “because their countrymen Chelkias and Ananias were in chief favor with the queen.”¹⁵ The next verse of Josephus unfortunately resumes the history of John Hyrcanus, and we do not know the subsequent events.

In connection with this episode it is worth recalling that W.O.E. Oesterley, back in 1930, stressed the influence of the general on the international policy of their queen. Even after Chelkias’ death in a battle in Phoenicia, some years after the fighting in Cyprus, Ananias was able to persuade the queen to keep peace with John Hyrcanus during her campaign in Palestine against her son.¹⁶ The generals were certainly great military leaders of their time and clever advisers to their queen, but connecting their names with the Jewish “large presence” in Cyprus is a risky suggestion. We simply do not have sources to support that view.

⁹ Concerning the letter, see 1 Macc. 15: 15–24. Cyprus is mentioned in 15, 23. Cf. Gryglewicz 1961, 207–209; Goldstein 1979, 499–500.

¹⁰ *Ant.* 13, 284.

¹¹ The date following Kyrris (1996, 135).

¹² *Ant.* 13, 287. A general political background of these events is briefly presented in Witkowski 1938, 180–182.

¹³ Concerning Onias IV, cf. Rappaport 1992, 24.

¹⁴ Cf. his article *The Jews in Ancient Cyprus* (Horst 2006, 26).

¹⁵ *Ant.* 12, 287 (Cf. Whiston 1987, 354).

¹⁶ Oesterley 1932, 290–291, quoting Josephus, *Ant.* 13, 354.

The next mentions in Josephus, again in his *Antiquitates*, concern Alexandra, who was the daughter of Phasaelus II and Salampsio, and the granddaughter of Herod the Great. She married Timios, an important figure from Cyprus, supposed to have been of Jewish origin.¹⁷ It is highly probable that this marriage had a special economic background to it. In the year 13/12 BC Herod the Great, ending his visit to the emperor, received a special privilege from Augustus: “Herod made him [Augustus] a present of three hundred talents, and he was then exhibiting shows and largesses to the people of Rome: and Caesar made him a present of half of the revenue of the copper mines in Cyprus, and committed the care of the other half to him, and honored him with other gifts and incomes.”¹⁸ J. Ciecielag is ready to accept the view that there is a connection between the event described here and the marriage of Alexandra: “We may suggest,” he says, “that Timios, a representative of the local aristocracy, was appointed the king’s procurator of the mines, which means that Alexandra probably lived in Cyprus with her husband.”¹⁹ The output of the mines was certainly of such great value that Herod the Great’s decision to offer his granddaughter to Timios would be explicable.²⁰

Josephus’ information about the exchange of gifts between Herod and Augustus has been discussed only relatively rarely.²¹ In many recent biographies of Herod the Great it is not even mentioned. This is the case in the new Schürer,²² the monograph by Schalit,²³ the article on the wealth of Herod the Great,²⁴ etc.²⁵ This is disappointing, as the profit from the Cypriot mines certainly enriched the king, who developed such an extensive building program²⁶ and certainly had many expenses besides that; suffice it to mention his generous gifts to dozens of cities abroad. He maintained a strong army and a large court at home. There is no doubt that he oppressed his subjects and imposed numerous heavy taxes. However, the peace which he offered to the inhabitants of Judaea, followed by the notable irrigation projects in the oasis of Jericho, the Golan and the Hauran areas, export of such rare goods as balsam and the dye extracted from the henna shrub, centralization of the transit trade of incense, herbs and spices, enriched him enormously. The Temple industry (pilgrimages, animals for sacrifices, regular donations to the Temple etc.) certainly made the Holy City an important commercial center. What is more, from 19 BC Herod most probably had permission to mint a special coin for the annual tax paid to the Temple authorities.²⁷ All that means that Herod the Great was a very wealthy monarch.

¹⁷ *Ant.* XVIII, 5, 4 (131). Suggested by Roth, l. cit. and accepted with hesitation by Horst (2006), 29.

¹⁸ *Ant.* XVI, 4, 5 (128). Translation quoted in Whiston (1987, 434).

¹⁹ Ciecielag (2002): 44. The same was the view of Nicolaou (1986, 435).

²⁰ It might be worth adding that the marriage was unhappy. Josephus remarks that Timios “was a man of note, but had by her [Alexandra] no children” (*Ant.* 18, 131). Tal Ilan (1995, 113) puts the question: was Alexandra barren or did she perhaps die in childbirth?

²¹ Only noticed for example by Prause 1980, 259–260.

²² Cf. Schürer 1973.

²³ Schalit 1969.

²⁴ Cf. Broshi 1992, 3–6.

²⁵ The gap in research is clearly visible in the well indexed bibliographies on Josephus, like Feldman 1984.

²⁶ Cf. among others Netzer 2006.

²⁷ Cf. Broshi 1992, 5 (quoting Meshorer 1982 (2), 7–9 and Meshorer 1984, 171–179).

In his testament Herod left to Emperor Augustus “ten million [drachmae] of coined money; besides both vessels of gold and silver, and garments exceedingly costly, to Julia, Caesar’s wife, and to certain others, five million,”²⁸ a truly royal gesture. Of course, he would have wanted to secure for his successor the best relations with the emperor, to whom he owed a lot and whose obedient servant he was, a client king of a country on the periphery of the *Imperium Romanum*. On the other hand, it was visible that Herod had an instinct for good financial investments. He lent large amounts of money to the Arabs, of course requiring a high interest in return. M. Grant justly described him as businessman, speculator and entrepreneur on a huge scale. His Cypriot enterprise is, therefore, in my opinion nothing special, but it is worthy of note and deserving of close analysis.

When Herod the Great came to see Augustus in Aquileia in the second half of the year 12 BC, to ask him to solve his family and succession problems, he was prepared for every consequence. When the decisions were taken (or rather suggested by the emperor) and they pleased Herod, he was courageous enough to offer his patron a gift of enormous value, three hundred talents of gold. He knew that Augustus probably needed money badly at that time. The emperor organized games and distributed money (*congiarium*) to the Roman people. Receiving such a great gift at the right moment, Augustus decided to offer Herod something of value in return. Herod received “half the revenue of the copper mines in Cyprus.” It is interesting that care of the other half was also given to Herod. In this way the entire Cypriot metal industry was entrusted to him.²⁹ Augustus was convinced that Herod would exercise care in fulfilling his duties and would certainly be loyal, and was sure of getting his half of the interest. That would probably be more than the amount he had received from his official representative on the island previously. Herod, for his part, needed copper and silver to produce his coins,³⁰ so it was obvious that the enterprise was mutually profitable.

I do not believe, as E.M. Smallwood does, that “the management of the other half” is unjustified and illogical; Herod surely did not control the half in which he had no financial interest.” It is logical. It is not out of the question that it was Herod who suggested the idea to Augustus. The latter, knowing Herod’s ruthlessness, was doing profitable business in giving him the mines. The deal was brightened by additional official “gifts” from the emperor. Augustus honored Herod also “with other gifts and incomes.” The business was masked with appearances of close friendship.

What could be the result of the deal? In my opinion Herod obviously sent his envoys and nominated his own representative to Cyprus. And here we return to Alexandra and Timios. Princess Alexandra was certainly accompanied by some, if not many, Jews of her own court. She represented her father, the friend of the emperor, and the members of her entourage could have been used in supervising separate mines. We cannot discount the possibility that within a few years a whole Jewish colony arose around the mines, even if it had not existed before the events described. It would be strange if the Jews (who were in “flourishing condition” in Cyprus according to

²⁸ Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 17, 190 (Whiston’s (1987, 464) translation).

²⁹ It should not be forgotten that Herod controlled trade routes to the east, and according to Grant (2000, 193) the metal was exported as far as to India.

³⁰ Cf. Skowronek 1994, 39–45.

Josephus) had not been involved in the most prosperous industry of the island, which was copper mining.

The next chronological mention of Jews in Cyprus is found in *Legatio ad Gaium* 282 of Philo of Alexandria. In this verse, quoted from a letter of King Agrippa II to Emperor Caligula, Philo mentions many countries where Jews had established “colonies.” Then he adds, “And not only are the continents full of Jewish colonies, but also all the most celebrated islands are so, too, such as Euboea, and Cyprus, and Crete.”³¹ We have here a clear confirmation that at the end of the fourth decade AD Cyprus had numerous citizens of Jewish origin.

Turning to what is chronologically the next source, the Acts of the Apostles, we find there mentions of numerous Jewish synagogues. We know for example that in Salamis there were at least a few synagogai, as Luke says that Paul and Barnabas, assisted by John, “landed at Salamis and proclaimed the world of God in the synagogues [plural!]³² of the Jews” (13, 5). It is very distressing that after so many years of regular excavations in the ruins of the ancient Salamis archaeologists have not yet discovered even one synagogue.³³ Of course we know that the city was destroyed by the Jewish rebellion in 116 AD, when Trajan was ruling the Roman Empire, but the total absence of Jewish remains from the city can only be put down to very bad luck on the part of the searchers. The only material proof of the presence of a synagogue in Salamis comes not from the first century, but from a much later period. As Mitford says, “the repair or embellishment of a synagogue in Salamis is attested for the 5th or 6th century.”³⁴

As we know from the Acts of Apostles, the missionaries “traveled the whole length of the island,” which might be interpreted as meaning that they preached in other synagogues as well. The existence of a synagogue at Amathus, for example, has already been mentioned.³⁵ We can suppose that practically in each of the eighteen known cities there were some Jewish colonies and synagogues.³⁶ And very probably nearly all of them, at least those in cities near the main roads,³⁷ would have been visited by the apostles. Unfortunately we do not know the results of the apostles’ work. There is not a hint about that in the text of Luke, except that the proconsul (gr. *anthypatos*) believed, but in fact the mission from Jerusalem was directed not to the gentiles but to the Cypriot fellow-countrymen of Barnabas. The exegetes agree that Paul’s theological principle was to proclaim the Gospel “to the Jew first but also to the Greek” (Rom I, 16). Preaching in the synagogues was “a regular practice” for Paul.³⁸ It seems that Paul “continued to use the synagogue even after he had become offensive to it.”³⁹

³¹ Philo, *On the Embassy to Gaius* 282 (translated by Yonge 1993, 783).

³² Cf. Wintherington 1997, 395. He is convinced that the synagogue “was a place, not just a gathering of people” (note 140 referring to p. 255 ff. of his book).

³³ Cf. Karageorghis 1969, 200–202; Finley 1977, 187–188 (Salamis); Yon 1980.

³⁴ Mitford 1950, 110, no. 3.

³⁵ Cf. note 8 above.

³⁶ Concerning the main Cypriot cities of the Early Roman period: Mitford 1980, 1308–1332.

³⁷ Cypriot highways in antiquity were described recently by Bekker-Nielsen (2004). Cf. also Bekker-Nielsen 2001, 247–254 and Gill 1995, 219–228.

³⁸ Barrett 2004, 611. Cf. Acts 13, 14; 14, 1; 17, 1; 18, 4 and 19; 19, 8.

³⁹ Barrett 2004, 611. Cf. 2 Cor 11, 24.

We know from the Acts that Barnabas came to Jerusalem from a Jewish colony in Cyprus (Acts 4, 36). It seems highly possible that he owned some agricultural area on the island,⁴⁰ as he sold it and offered the proceeds to the Apostles (Acts 4, 37). B. Winterington even suggests that, when coming to Salamis with Paul and Mark, Barnabas “still had close contacts, perhaps family as well, in the Jewish community there.”⁴¹ But it seems that even that connection did not help the apostles. The Jews remained reluctant.⁴²

St. Paul left Cyprus and moved his mission in the direction of Perge, the Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, then to Lystra and Derbe in Lycaonia. After leaving Cyprus by sea, the ways of the three apostles separated. John Mark was the first to leave, immediately after landing at Perge in Pamphylia (Acts 13, 13). We can only speculate on the reason for his departure: family problems or the family’s request. Perhaps it was a need to report to the heads of the Jerusalem Church on the results of the mission, or simply disappointment in his role during the visit to the island. It seems that Paul’s opinion of John Mark was not as good (Acts 15, 38) as that of Barnabas, who was a close relative of John Mark’s (Col. 4, 10). At the end, after the return from the mission in Pamphylia and Pisidia and the council of Jerusalem Barnabas too separated from Paul, because Paul did not want to see John Mark again in their mission. After a “violent quarrel” Paul continued his mission in Asia Minor with Silas (Acts 15, 40) only. It is interesting that Paul never returned to Cyprus and never even mentioned that area in his letters. That could mean only one thing. The undertaking directed to the Jewish colonists on the island really failed to produce the results Paul expected. If they had been significant that would have been noted by Luke. But it was not. This state of affairs can be supported by the wish expressed by Barnabas to go back to Cyprus after the Jerusalem council and “visit all the towns where we preached the word of Lord, so that we can see how the brothers are doing” (Acts 15, 36–37).

Barnabas and John Mark’s second mission to Cyprus was unfortunately not described in the Acts. We are only informed that “Barnabas sailed off [from Antioch] with Mark to Cyprus” (Acts 15, 39). More data are supplied in the “Acta et Passio

⁴⁰ However, from the quoted text it is not clear if Barnabas owned some piece of land in Palestine or in Cyprus. It is also not clear if he left his own family on the island. I would prefer to suggest that he was not married and left some relatives there only. It would have been rather immoral to him to sell his land and leave his wife and children without any support. Of course it was possible to divorce, but that was not allowed by the teaching of Jesus, so we can probably count it out. But it is evident that he was bound to Cyprus, as he went back to the island again and was eventually killed by his fellow-countrymen. The tradition about his martyrdom is confirmed by the *Acts of Barnabas*. Costas P. Kyrris (1974, 97–125) has traced his story and cult in the Cypriot tradition since the paleochristian period.

⁴¹ Winterington 1997, 395.

⁴² Despite the claim in Acts 11, 19 that before Paul “Cyprus had already been reached by Christian missionaries, and the journey of Saul and Barnabas could be regarded as in the first instance a revisiting of converts already made and churches already established; no mention however is made of such converts and churches, and for this reason the notice in 11, 19 is often discounted”: Barrett 2004, 610–611. I fully agree with this obvious interpretation of the texts. If we accept that [Q.] Sergius Paulus was *anthypatos* of Cyprus in 37 at the latest, as I do, it is evident that rules out the existence of already established groups or churches on the island (however small they were). Concerning the dating of the *anthypatos*, cf. Kapera 2009, 18 and 2010, in press. In fact the text of Acts 11, 19 states only that some paleochristians ‘scattered’ after the death of St. Stephen and reached Cyprus spreading the news, speaking a lot (*lalantes ton logon*) to the Jews only, not necessarily converting them.

Barnabae in Cypro,” but this document is relatively late and probably reflects some tradition about the conversion of the island.⁴³ Costas P. Kyrris, an expert on the Byzantine period, is convinced that we should not underestimate or reject such apocryphal texts. Even local Cypriot “Synaxaria” “come from a venerable local church tradition which condenses or crystallizes events unknown to the non-Cypriot authors.”⁴⁴ According to his research Barnabas “preached ... for a number of years.”⁴⁵ The Apostle is venerated in Salamis on Cyprus as a martyr and founder of the church on the island.

The “Acts of St. Barnabas” come from the period 431 and 488, as established by M. Starowieyski,⁴⁶ and the “Panegyric” is even later, dating to the middle of the sixth century (certainly before 648, when Salamis was looted by the Arabs).⁴⁷ More valuable are the Acts, which include some Cypriot traditions concerning bishops living from the 2nd to the 5th centuries and show good knowledge of the topography of the island. A characteristic element of this work is the negative attitude to the Jews (enemy number one is the magos Bar-Jesus). On the other hand, we do not find traces of enmity to the pagans. Starowieyski recognizes in this a repercussion of the “important role of the Jewish community in Cyprus before the year 116 and a pogrom of inhabitants of the island organized by the Jews in that year.”⁴⁸ The topographical data of the Acts are valuable for the historian interested in the history of Cypriot Jews. They indirectly identify for us the areas where the Jews were living⁴⁹, not necessarily in the fifth century, as the traditions could be of much earlier origin.

One more Cypriot Jew, named Mnason, is mentioned in the Acts 21, 16. He was one of the first disciples of the period of St. Stephen’s martyrdom. His name “may have been a hellenization of the Hebrew ‘menasseh’ (Manasseh), but it was an authentic Greek name.”⁵⁰ He is called a Hellenist by many exegetes, but the term “archaios” may simply mean “of long standing” as a member of the church. He hosted Paul and his companions in Jerusalem after their return from the third missionary trip; some say halfway between Caesarea and Jerusalem, but that is not evident from the text; presumably it was rather Jerusalem.⁵¹ This event took place in 58 AD.⁵² Both the story of Barnabas and that of Mnason are interesting examples showing that the rich⁵³

⁴³ Cf. Starowieyski 1991, 391–413; 1994, 193–198.

⁴⁴ Cf. Kyrris 1974, 102–103.

⁴⁵ Cf. Kyrris 1974, 125. It is regrettable that the author did not continue his paper on Barnabas and Paul, ending with their first mission.

⁴⁶ Starowieyski 1993, 323.

⁴⁷ Starowieyski 1991, 401.

⁴⁸ Starowieyski 1991, 399.

⁴⁹ The following cities are mentioned in the Acts: Anemurium, Kromnion (to-day Kormachitis), Lapitos, Lampadistos, Tamassos, Kition, Old Paphos, Kourion, Amathusa (sic!), Salamis, Ledra, and Limnes. Cf. Starowieyski 1991, 407–410 (passim).

⁵⁰ Bruce 1990, 443. However, Dąbrowski (1961, 418–419) preferred the identification of the name Mason with the Greek Jason or latinized Nason.

⁵¹ Bruce 1990, 443.

⁵² His date is traditionally accepted by the exegetes.

⁵³ Such is the opinion of Jeremias (1969, 105) concerning Barnabas.

Jewish Cypriots often travelled to Judaea and Jerusalem because of their religion, relatives and trade. Wine and copper first of all were imported to Jerusalem.⁵⁴

When looking at the indexes of Josephus Flavius' writings, it is surprising that we find so few data about Jews from Cyprus. In fact the *Jewish Antiquities* contains only one name of a Cypriote, Atomos (Simon) from the early 50s of the first century AD. It is intriguing that in his case again (like in Acts 13, 7–12) we are faced with a magus coming from the island. Again he is a Jew, similarly to the case of the already mentioned Bar-Jesus of the court of Sergius Paulus, probably performing the role of adviser and astrologer, this time at the court of Felix, the procurator of Judaea in the years 52–58/59 AD).⁵⁵ Atomos' name remains a mystery. The Greek version established by B. Niese has the name Atomos; however, some manuscripts have the Latin translation Simon, a typical Jewish name; the latter name also appears in some marginal notes in the *Antiquities*.⁵⁶

Atomos was used as an envoy of governor Antonius Felix to Drusilla, the sister of Agrippa II. At that time, about 53 AD, Drusilla, who was born in 38/39 AD,⁵⁷ was a young girl of about fourteen. Just a year or two before, her brother Agrippa II had given her in marriage to Azizus, king of Emesa, "upon his consent to be circumcised," contrary to the first candidate Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus (*Ant.* XX, VII, 139). The marriage was dissolved very soon. The anecdote is so amusing that is worth quoting this passage of Josephus in full:

While Felix was procurator of Judea, he saw this Drusilla, and fell in love with her; for she did indeed exceed all other women in beauty, and he sent to her a person whose name was Simon, one of his friends; a Jew he was, and by birth a Cypriot, and one who pretended to be a magician; and endeavored to persuade her to forsake her present husband, and marry him; and promised that if she would not refuse him, he would make her a happy woman. Accordingly she acted ill, and because she was desirous to avoid her sister Berenice's envy, for she was very ill treated by her on account of her beauty, was prevailed upon to transgress the laws of her forefathers, and to marry Felix; and when he had had a son by her, he named him Agrippa. But after what manner that young man, with his wife, perished at the conflagration of the mountain Vesuvius, in the days of Titus Caesar, shall be related hereafter.⁵⁸

It is very characteristic that the Roman governor kept close to him a magus from Cyprus. There are some serious suppositions that there existed a special school of magoi in Old Paphos. Atomos would have been one of its members. Felix used the magus, probably expecting that he had some special magic talent which would help him to convince Drusilla to leave her husband and come to him. What is more, being an educated Jew who knew not only Jewish law but probably also Roman law,

⁵⁴ Josephus (*Ant.* 20, 51) also informs of the import of dried figs by Queen Helene of Adiabene during a famine in Palestine.

⁵⁵ Concerning Felix and his relationship with the Jews, cf. Schürer 1973, 459–466; Dąbrowski 1965, 235–237; Bosak 1996, 132–134; Ciecielag 2000, 137–141; 2002, 163–164; Rapske 2000, 982–983; Vermes 2006, 78–79 (s.v. Feliks); Chronological problems of Felix's rule in Judea, cf. Rakocy 2003, 290–301.

⁵⁶ Cf. Schalit 1968, 113 (s.v. 24 Simon). It is regrettable that in the last 50 years the idea of Franz Blatt (1958) to publish a full Latin version of Josephus has not been continued. A close look at the 171 Latin manuscripts probably would explain why we have such a difference between the Greek name ('Atomos) and the Hebrew one (Simon).

⁵⁷ Cf. Ciecielag 2002, 140.

⁵⁸ *Ant.* 20, 142–144. Whiston's translation (1987, 533–534).

‘Atomos was able to persuade Drusilla to send her husband a letter of divorce, which was prohibited by Mosaic law⁵⁹ at that time but was allowed by Roman law.⁶⁰ As we know, ‘Atomos’ mission succeeded. It is not clear from Josephus when ‘Atomos became a “friend” of procurator Felix. Had he been one already before his mission to Drusilla, or did he acquire that title after the event? It is worth recalling that some years later Drusilla met Paul the apostle. She was very much interested in what exactly Paul was preaching to the Jews in Jerusalem and wanted to listen to him in person when he became a prisoner in Caesarea. E. Mary Smallwood explains that action of Drusilla’s, saying that her “knowledge of Jewish thought and customs” might have been helpful to Felix in “permit[ting] him to avoid treading of Jewish corns.”⁶¹ However, Drusilla’s first unofficial meeting with Paul was not very profitable for her, as Paul spoke about “righteousness, self-control and the coming Judgment” (Acts 24, 25), which immediately froze discussion. Felix realized at once that Paul had touched on a very delicate problem which also concerned the legality of his marriage, and, being afraid of discussing that, decided to return the apostle to his cell.⁶² It is perhaps worth adding that two years later Felix’ successor, procurator Porcius Festus, also interrogated Paul in Caesarea in the presence of Jewish notables, King Agrippa II and Berenice, Drusilla’s sister (Acts 25,13–26,32).

To sum up, these mentions of the activities of the Cypriots, ‘Atomos and Bar-Jesus, might suggest that in the times of the Julio-Claudian dynasty some Jews of the island were relatively rich, well-educated and allowed into the local governmental courts. Some of them turned out to be very useful, since, like ‘Atomos, they were called friends of provincial governors.

It is surprising that in the texts of Josephus we do not find even one mention of a Cypriot in connection with the first Jewish rebellion against the Romans (66–70 AD). Did the Cypriot Jews stay out of trouble? It looks rather unlikely to me. News of the rebellion and anti-Roman ideas must have spread rapidly, and furthermore, coins of the first year of the rebellion are known from Cyprus. Such silver coins are known from the excavations at Curium.⁶³ J.J. Price explains their presence through commerce still going on at the beginning of the revolt or by travels of Roman soldiers. In any case, he reminds us, the coins, even if they were officially not used after 70 AD and their symbols and legends were incomprehensible, remained valuable because of their silver.⁶⁴

As is known from ancient sources, the Cypriot Jews were obliged to supply wine for the Jerusalem Temple.⁶⁵ The find might mean only that Jerusalem and Cyprus were

⁵⁹ Cf. discussion in Hoehner (1980, 139, note 1). According to Ilan (1995, 146, and especially note 31) the debate “over whether women in Judaea of the Second Temple period, even if not in Pharisaic circles, were legally permitted to divorce their husbands” still continues. The debate started when Milik (1957, 21) announced in 1956 the existence of a “get” from Nahal Hever.

⁶⁰ Cf. Deut, 24,1; the Mishnah, Gittin VI, 1–IX, 10 (detailed rules concerning divorce) and the Roman *Codex Iustinianum* (V, 17, 5–6; VIII, 38, 2).

⁶¹ Smallwood 1981, 270.

⁶² Cf. Dąbrowski 1953, 457.

⁶³ Cox 1959, no. 200 (quoted in Price, see below).

⁶⁴ Price 1992, 242.

⁶⁵ Cf. note 4.

still in close touch (at least at the beginning of the rebellion). However, J.J. Price is right in the final statement that the number of coins is limited, so they cannot “support definite conclusions.”⁶⁶

Early in 69 AD, Titus, son of the future emperor Vespasian, visited Cyprus and the famous temple of Aphrodite at Paphos.⁶⁷ We can only speculate on whether this visit with a strong military escort impressed the Jewish inhabitants of Cyprus so much that no members of the Sicarii decided to shelter rebels or instigate a rebellion against the Romans after the fall of Jerusalem. They scattered in Cyrenaica and Egypt first of all, and we do not find a hint about their activity in Cyprus. That is significant, as Josephus devoted a special final chapter of his Jewish War to the years 70–73 AD and such activity would certainly have been recorded. However, two generations later, at the beginning of the second century AD, the rich and flourishing Jewish colonies in Cyprus were smashed to pieces by the regular Roman army. Without any known reason, the peaceful and quiet Jewish citizens rose⁶⁸ against the Roman authority and the Greeks, their fellow citizens in 116 AD, with fatal consequences for the island.⁶⁹

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⁶⁶ Price 1992, 242.

⁶⁷ Cf. Tac. *Hist.* II, 2–4; Suet. *Titus* 5.

⁶⁸ Dio Cassius, LXVIII, 32, 3.

⁶⁹ H. Hauben, Herod the Great and the Copper Mines of Cyprus, *Ancient Society* 35 (2005): 175–195; A. Destrooper-Georgiades, Jewish Coins in Cyprus, *Israel Numismatic Research* 1 (2006): 37–49.

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